

SOCIAL MEDIA'S GIG-ECONOMY PARTICIPATION AMONGST CONTEMPORARY MALAYSIA'S MUSLIM ENTREPRENEURS

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ABSTRACT

*The Industrial Revolution 4.0 has brought immense significant changes towards global media operations amongst Muslims. Malaysia's Muslims are of no exception. Among others include the wide usage of smart phones, computers, and latest gadgets as tool for setting-up numerous platforms for venturing into gig-economy. Such developments had altered the public media dependency upon the previous conventional media—especially in relation to publicizing, promoting, and marketing personal business products. Thus to date, data had shown that Malaysia's Muslim Entrepreneurs' participation are escalating in encouraging numbers. This latest platform of entrepreneurial arena is somehow different from the traditional marketing strategies adopted before. Numerous new methods and approaches had been applied since the arrival of the 4.0 revolution. Save but a few Malaysia's Muslim Entrepreneurs understood the needs and requirements of this latest marketing realm. Most simply indulge without prior preparations. For that reason, this paper is aimed at assessing significant observations on the issue in particular. It will first discuss on the Industrial Revolution 4.0, then moving towards the demands of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0—before seeking for understandings in the realm of social media gig-economy, and Malaysia's Muslim entrepreneurial participations. Few legislations will be brought into discussion, such as Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (Act 588), Competition Act 2010 (Act 712), and Competition Commission Act 2010 (Act 713). Without prejudice, this paper deserve its audience—to the very least, it will shed lights for a much wider future discussions on Malaysia's Muslim Entrepreneurs involving social media for gig-economy. Quoting Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, 1859: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, or the most intelligent. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change". In this very essence of adaptiveness, the survivals of contemporary Malaysia's Muslim Entrepreneurs require competent and sufficient understanding on this matter. Nevertheless, may this paper become a beacon of reference amongst Malaysia's Muslim Entrepreneurs—by not allowing them to be buffeted on the tides of history due to deliberate ignorance upon understanding the needs and requirements of social media platforms in the future and beyond?*

Keywords: Malaysia's Muslim Entrepreneurs, Social Media, Gig-Economy, Involving Acts

INTRODUCTION

The domain of gig-economy is undeniably immense and perilous. Much had been talked about, yet little can be truly understood. Some perceived gig economy as a mere trend; some perceived otherwise. The actual data on gig-economy workers and entrepreneurs are still scarce. All the data that this paper is presenting were only based upon estimations. Very, very limited

empirical research data are available today. Obviously, specific gig-workers' demographic data—such as age, race, religion, and qualifications became almost impossible to derive. Despite such cruciality, this paper provided estimations from reliable sources—as well as evidential news reporting data. Thus, the absolute purpose of this concept paper is to trigger impactful awareness on the importance of gig-economy's future and beyond among the academicians. It requires our high sense of altruism to consistently preach upon this matter—which solely aimed for the betterment of our future Fintech society.

A naïve mind now may pause to ask on what is the significance of gig-economy to be presented in this 3rd International Conference on Islam, Media, and Communication. Indeed, its significances are countless. Gig-economy was rooted out of the explosion of information communication technology after the fall of Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989. Inescapably, gig-economy became media and communication issue itself. As for Malaysia, most of her conventional employees are Malay Muslims. It is true that to date, most countries had openly acknowledged gig-economy's impact and existence—yet, not much had been so far. Malaysia on the other hands began acknowledging gig-economy in 2019—and recently had come up with its blueprint. At least we had something in hand despite so much had to be done still—and we are still searching for clues of what should properly be done. Obviously, this is due to the characteristics of gig-economy itself—transgressing the traditional borders of employment that the world had previously so complacent to deal with. To some, the dark age of oppression is back—when the gig-economy's hiring companies treating their gig-workers differently with limited benefits and job securities.

All of those will be discussed in this paper—which will first begin by straightening out on definitions, characteristics, and conception. Later, it ventures into entrepreneurs; Malaysia's blueprint; contemporary global predicaments; and, demands and challenges. In a simplest comprehension, this paper is urging everyone to put on a brand new thinking paradigm in understanding this new digital media economic frontier. Only by this and this alone, we might be able to manoeuvre our ways through this treacherous realm of gig-economy.

DEFINITIONS OF GIG-ECONOMY

Without prejudice, the realm of gig-economy is still in a grey area. To date, not much of its definition had been certain. Worldwide scholars are still searching the most absolute definition of gig-economy. Nevertheless, here are several attempts in defining it, beginning from Bill Wilson (a business Reporter of BBC News) *via* an article titled What is the 'gig'-economy? He explained gig-economy as "a labour market characterised by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work, as opposed to permanent jobs". The article was published on 10 February 2017. On the other side, another attempt was made through Randstad website (retrieved 22 May 2021, MYT) by stating—"the New Yorker calls the gig-economy the on-demand, peer, or platform economy". Simply means, the term gig-economy consists of companies who engaged contract workers for a temporary period or project-based jobs, instead of hiring them for permanent positions (*ibid.*).

Under the same discussion, perhaps a more comprehensive attempt to define gig-economy came from Investopedia website (retrieved 22 May 2021, MYT). Of which it explained, gig-economy is a trading domain of where flexible jobs are being common. Within that domain, companies prefer to hire independent contractors and freelancers, instead of full-time employees. In another word, gig-economy that we have today is undeliberately undermining the traditional economic practice of hiring full-time workers. Further, Investopedia underlined three characteristics of gig-economy (*ibid.*):

1. **Gig-economy**—of which, is based on flexible, temporary, or freelance jobs, often involving connecting with clients or customers through an online platform.
2. **Gig-economy**—of which, can benefit workers, businesses, and consumers by making work more adaptable to the needs of the moment and demand for flexible lifestyles.
3. **Gig-economy**—of which, can have downsides due to the erosion of traditional economic relationships between workers, businesses, and clients.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GIG-ECONOMY

The term gig-economy was sourced out of digital economy—which refers to all sorts of economic activities that are relying on computers. As such it can be seen as having the widest scope; encompassing the platform economy; and also digital activities not mediated by actual platforms. The simplest example is an economic transaction completed solely by email or cell phones. Studies worldwide study in 2017 had estimated about 70 million people have registered on online platforms. The following year in 2018, gig-economy had generated USD204 billion in gross volumes—with estimation of worldwide growth to USD455 billion by the year 2023 (ibid.). Prior to our discussion, an article by Leslie Lau, The pitfalls of not saving for the future in Malaysia's rising gig-economy published by the Malay Mail on 10th February 2020 had stressed further on the origin of gig-economy. It begins as slang for the temporary engagement of peripatetic musicians to perform for a short period of time ranging from one night to even a few months at a particular venue (ibid.).

Basically the word 'gig' in the term gig-economy is suggestive of short-term arrangements typical of a musical event. It suggests an arrangement similar to musicians being booked for a gig at a particular venue. Such bookings typically have a specified time and won't be long term. In short, there is no guarantee of repeat bookings, and sometimes no defined methods of payment. The same tasks have been characterized in gig-economy—short, temporary, precarious, and unpredictable. However, the rapid expansion of digital age that we are facing today has given rise to it in euphemistic way of describing short-term contractual or freelance work, as opposed to permanent jobs which come with benefits like medical coverage and statutory savings contributions like for the Employees Provident Fund (ibid.). Evidently gig-workers consisted of a large numbers of people who are acting as suppliers and consumers. In simplest understanding, suppliers are comprised of those who are hiring companies—and also delivery workers who are willing to do part-time jobs, holding temporary positions, and being independent entrepreneurs. Whereas, the consumers are comprised of whoever are subscribing to the services on digital platforms. Nevertheless according to Wikipedia, there are three triggering factors of gig-economy—Technological literacy and adaptiveness; The Covid-19 pandemic; and, Cost Effective Market Environment. Here are their brief explanations (retrieved 22 May 2021, MYT):

First: Technological Literacy and Adaptiveness

The profound impact of gig-economy does not offer only on cheaper and efficient services—but also in wide job offerings to a wide variety of positions. The work can range from GrabFood, Foodpanda to Lalamove in delivering food to a specific location codes. To some extent, colleges and universities has cut costs in fulfilling academic needs of hiring adjunct and part-time professors (ibid.). However, for those who are illiterate or non-adaptive to technology will be left behind. Personal observation shows how distant villages were being actively participating in gig-economy—contrary to general presumptions that only the urban population will be mostly enthralled to participate. There are only two prerequisite skills of gig-economy participation—literate, and adaptive to technology.

Second: The Covid-19 Pandemic

Indeed, gig-economy's participation had been triggered by Covid-19 pandemic—and had exponentially accelerated since then. Since March 2020 in Malaysia's experience, gig-economy had significantly increased when gig-workers had been delivering necessities to home-bound consumers. Such increase in number of gig-workers were due to countless retrenchments prior to the pandemic—thus, were forced to turn themselves into part time or contract workers. However, one may ponder on what will happen when the pandemic has ended.

Third: Cost Effective Market Environment

Indeed, cost effective market environment became another gig-economy's triggering factor. In the United States of America to date, workers largely prefer to work as a part-time and from home. Employers also no longer had to engage in extensive job interviews to hire anyone based on proximity (ibid.). In fact, gig-entrepreneurs worldwide are no longer hiring full-time workers. All they need are those who are willing to fill in vacancies of part-time or temporary. The workers may also work for another company. On the other side of the equation, this scenario had been warmly welcomed by the majority of gig-economy workers. They perceive the job vacancies in gig-economy as useful tools in sufficing needs of earning extra income in matching up with their demanding lifestyles.

CONCEPTION OF GIG-ECONOMY

The birth or the conception of gig-economy stretches back to the birth of information communication technology (ICT)—which later came up with series of platform economy, known as Web 1.0, Web 2.0, Web 3.0, and Web 4.0 categories. Its rapid development allows for the efficient and cost effective flow of information, products, workforce, and capital across national and regional boundaries.

Though ICT is not a panacea for all rural development problems, it has the potential to help rural poor to leap from some traditional barriers to development. Many aspects have been significantly improved *via* ICT *via* effective applications. As for the case of Malaysia, the use of ICT is expanding rapidly. ICT that came into the country comprises of a diverse set of technological tools and resources to create, disseminate, store, and manage data and information. Traditional ICT tools such as television, radio, and telephone have proven their effectiveness in promoting development in marginalized areas (Omar, 1995).

This baggage of had actually arrived along with the emergence of Internet-equipped computers—along with the android-equipped cell phones that provides a cordless communication technology (ibid.). Overnight, websites became tremendously popular and essential to everyone. This technological advancement had slashed the costs of information and communication. For instance, electronic mail (e-mail) today is a free service. Internet telephony offers much cheaper long-distance communication than the traditional way. The cost of transmitting digital information to anywhere in the globe has fallen dramatically. All these have enabled developing countries like Malaysia to gain some benefits from the technological advancements (ibid.).

However in some extents, few other gaps had also been created—*i.e.*, the rich against the poor; the developed against the undeveloped; and the technologically literate against the illiterate. All of these have created 'the digital divide'. Study in 2001 had observed that all countries, even the poorest, are increasing their access to ICT—though the developed moves faster (Ahmed, 2001). Shouldering the aspiration of answering to this new demand, Malaysia had consistently expanding her wireless communication facilities for the last twenty years. Wireless technologies

hold the promise for the future data transfer, as we are rapidly becoming an information-saggy society. Wireless technologies have significant potential to serve the information needs of the current and future generations. Indeed, wireless technologies had been foreseen many years ago as the prime movers in the telecommunications arena (Mahathir Mohammad, 2000).

The Emergence of Web 1.0

After a decade, the Web operations changed tremendously. It has grown bigger in term of information, technology, so on and so forth. The Web 1.0 became a place, virtual though it may be, where people getting informed, paid, hired, registered, and so on. It shares a common entity—everything that is on the Web must be current. They expect the same web sites to be different whenever they open it the next time—even within the gap of a few minutes. People rarely return to a web site if they keep seeing the same information (ibid.).

The Emergence of Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is the kind of web that we had today. It had been associated with web applications that facilitate participatory information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Its site allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community, in contrast to websites where users are limited to the passive viewing of content that was created for them. Among the examples include social networking sites, web-logs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services, and, web applications. The term had been closely associated with Tim O'Reilly because of the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in late 2004.

Although the term suggests a new version of the World Wide Web, it does not refer to an update to any technical specification. The term "Web 2.0" was actually been coined in January 1999 by Darcy DiNucci, a consultant on electronic information design. In her article, *Fragmented Future*, DiNucci writes: “The Web we know now, which loads into a browser window in essentially static screenfulls, is only an embryo of the Web to come”. The first glimmerings of Web 2.0 are beginning to appear, and we are just starting to see how that embryo might develop.

The Web will be understood not as screen-full of text and graphics but as a transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens. It will appear on your computer screen, on your TV set your car dashboard, your cell phone, hand-held game machines, and maybe even your microwave oven. Her use of the term deals mainly with Web design, aesthetics, and the interconnection of everyday objects with the Internet; she argues that the Web is fragmenting due to the widespread use of portable Web-ready devices. Anyway, does not directly relate to the current uses of the term (ibid.).

Users and Usages of Web 2.0

Another importance of Web 2.0 is the Social Web which became fundamental shift in the way of mass communication. It consists of a number of online tools and platforms where people share their perspectives, opinions, thoughts and experiences. Web 2.0 applications tend to interact much more with the end users. As such, the end user are not only a user of the application, but also a participant by podcasting, blogging, tagging, contributing, bookmarking, and, social networking.

The popularity of the term Web 2.0, along with the increasing use of web-logs, wikis, and social networking technologies, has led many in academia and business to coin a flurry of 2.0s, including Library 2.0, Social Work 2.0, Enterprise 2.0, PR 2.0, Classroom 2.0, Publishing 2.0,

Medicine 2.0, Telco 2.0, Travel 2.0, Government 2.0, and even Porn 2.0. Many of these 2.0s refer to Web 2.0 technologies as the source of the new version in their respective disciplines and areas. As for marketers, Web 2.0 offers a wide opportunity to engage consumers by collaborating in product development, service enhancement, and promotion. On the other hands, company employees created wikis–web sites that allow them to add, delete, and edit contents.

The Emergence of Web 3.0

Definitions of Web 3.0 vary greatly. Some believe, its most important feature is the Semantic Web and personalization. It actually is an extension of Web 2.0's participatory technologies and social networks (*i.e.*, facebook, web-logs, etc.) into 3D space. This Web 3.0's most defining characteristic will be the mass diffusion of open video to TVs, laptops, tablets, and mobile devices. It has also been predicted that Web 3.0 will allow the user to sit back and let the Internet do all of the work for them.

The Emergence of Web 4.0

As for Web 4.0, it has been predicted to be the Semantic Web and the rise of statistical, machine-constructed semantic tags, and algorithms. It will be driven by broad collective use of conversational interfaces. David Siegel's perspective in *Pull: The Power of the Semantic Web*, 2009, proposes that the growth of human-constructed semantic standards and data will be an industry-specific incremental process for years to come.

GIG-ECONOMY ENTREPRENEURS

Any discussion about gig-economy must begin with an aspiration of gaining a proper understanding of its entrepreneurs—which comprised of both hiring companies and gig-workers. In accordance to such aspiration, Wikipedia had divided them into five different categories (retrieved 22 May 2021, 12:22pm MYT):

1. Independent contractors;
2. Online platform workers;
3. Contract firm workers;
4. On-call workers; and,
5. Temporary workers.

During the early years of gig-economy entrepreneurial, it enjoyed light regulation. The inherently border-crossing nature of gig-economy had somehow made it very challenging to regulate. Another difficulty is the lack of consensus about what exactly constitutes the gig-economy. Likewise, many critics had argued that the existing laws were not designed to deal with gig-economy. Concerns had been circled around issues of tax, hygiene, safety, crime, compliance, fair competition, protection of rights, and protection of interests. Despite being hired temporarily, the rights of gig-workers as employees are still being highly debated across the globe. Some companies are classifying their gig-workers as "independent contractors", while its labor advocates insisted in classifying them as "employees". The advocates demanded the hiring companies to provide the full suite of employee benefits—as normal employees are receiving. Such benefits include health care, unemployment insurance, paid sick time, and overtime payments (*ibid.*).

The Progress in the United States of America of Gig-Economy

Entrepreneurs of gig-economy caught the attention of many sectors since its existence. Debates and discussions had been going on and on especially in among the Legislative and Governmental bodies. As for the United States of America (USA), the serious tone can be pointed out in 2015 where nearly 24 percent of American adults earned money *via* gig-platform (Reference). Four years later in 2019, California Legislature passed a Law (known as AB5) which requires all companies to reclassify their gig-workers from the status of independent contractors to the status of employees.

Consequently, application-based of ride-sharing and delivery companies such as Doordash, Postmates, Instacart, Uber, and Lyft came up with a ballot initiative, Proposition 22. The proposition as ratified on 3rd November 2020 granted gig-workers with fewer benefits compared to normal employees. Despite fewer benefits that the Proposition 22 granted, the list is somehow quite comprehensive. Conclusively, it agrees to these five enlisted areas (*ibid.*):

- 1) The total of 120 percent (of the local minimum wage) for each hour that their gig-workers spent on driving (with passenger or en route)—but not on waiting;
- 2) An amount of USD0.30 per mile will be paid for expenses on each mile spent by their gig-workers—with passenger or en route;
- 3) Health insurance will be stipend for any of their gig-workers who averagely spent more than 15 hours per week on driving;
- 4) The companies are to pay medical costs and some lost income for their gig-workers who were hurt while driving or waiting; and,
- 5) The hiring companies are prohibited from workplace discrimination—thus, they are required to conduct criminal background checks, to mandate safety training for drivers, as well as to develop sexual harassment policies.

The Progress in the Europeans Countries of Gig-Economy

Consequent to this discussion, one might begin to ponder upon gig-workers' condition in the Europe. It is notorious that the United Kingdom has the highest incidence of gig-workers today. Other European countries with high relative values are Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Italy, and Spain. By contrast, France, Sweden, Finland, Slovakia, and Hungary showed very low values. Their typical characteristics of gig-workers are: young male; having family and kids; and, had lesser years of working experience compares to normal employees (*ibid.*). Majority of Europe's gig-workers provide more than one type of services—and are active on two or more gig-economy platforms. Thus, for the United Kingdom, some of its legal rulings have classified full-time freelancers (that work for a single main employer of the gig-economy) as workers. Therefore awarded them with regular worker rights and protection. For example, in the case of *Uber vs. Aslam*, on 26 October 2016 the Court ruling against Uber by supporting the claim of two Uber drivers. Two years later, Uber had also lost another case 9*ibid.*)

Consequently in 2019, the United Kingdom Supreme Court had provided guidance on the correct way to categorize gig-economy workers. Most recent on 19 February 2021, the United Kingdom Supreme Court had ruled in favor of 25 Uber drivers (*ibid.*). This has been an on-going matter ever since.

The Progress in Latin Americans of Gig-Economy

According to data from early 2016, only three home grown platform companies with a market capitalization greater than USD1 billion had emerged in South America. Those were MercadoLibre, Despegar.com, and B2W (retrieved 29 May 2021, 5:43pm MYT). In Brazil, the Portuguese language provides an advantage to home grown companies with active start up scene

existing in Sao Paolo. A more successful development of gig-economy occurred in Argentina when it became a haven for creating platforms outside of its own borders. Apart from those two mentioned countries, gig-economy has not grown any faster elsewhere (ibid.).

The Progress in Asian Countries of Gig-Economy

Global Survey in 2016 had ascertained Asia as becoming a home to the largest number of platform companies, having a market capitalization over USD930 billion. The figure stood at the second rank to North America whom had market capitalization of USD3 trillion. Much of Asia's platform companies then were concentrated in hubs located in Bangalore, India, and Hangzhou, China (ibid.). Specifically, according to another regional survey on the same year, China significantly accounted for 73 percent of market capitalization—while Northeast Asia by 22 percent, India by 4 percent, and ASEAN countries by 1 percent. Across China, homegrown platforms tend to dominate the whole platform economy. Outside of China, Asian-based platforms have been enjoying rapid growth in areas relating to e-commerce (ibid.).

The same gig-economy culture had also invaded Japan and Korea—of which they both had 17 platform companies with collective market capitalization of USD244 billion. The Top 5 companies were Softbank, Yahoo Japan, Rakuten, and Nintendo (of Japan), and Naver of South Korea (ibid.). Furthermore, the survey found that Facebook became the most popular social media platform in India and Myanmar. Despite having less platform companies than Japan and South Korea, India owned 9 major platform companies with collective market capitalization of USD39 billion. Its biggest platforms were Flipkart, and Snapdeal. As for the Southeast Asian countries, three companies were growing exponentially—*i.e.*, Garena (Singapore), Grab (Malaysia), and GO-JEK (Indonesia). Collectively the three platform companies had market capitalization of USD7 billion (ibid.).

MALAYSIA'S DIGITAL ECONOMY BLUEPRINT (MY DIGITAL)

Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) was officially launched by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on 19th February 2020. This Government Plans aimed at transforming Malaysia into a digitally-driven, high income nation, and a regional leader in digital economy. MyDIGITAL was endorsed thru Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Putrajaya, Malaysia (retrieved 24 May 2021, 8:18 am MYT). As reported by Priya Sunil in Human Resources Online.net on 22nd February 2021, MyDIGITAL was drafted to empower every Malaysian inclusively. Among others are in making banking and finance businesses easier and more organised; generating ideas and plans to improve digital literacy; creating high-income jobs; bringing medical facilities closer; and providing virtual educational access to the maximum capacity. MyDIGITAL will serve as transformation direction plan in enabling business sectors to compete on the global stage by strengthening the smoothness and efficiency of their operations. More, it aspires to complete the country's national development policies such as the 12th Malaysia Plan and Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (ibid.).

In order to attain such aspirations, there are four essential digital infrastructures must be first built—*via* Government and private partnerships with private sectors. It had been decided that the first RM12 billion to RM15 billion will be invested by Cloud Service Provider (CSP) companies over the next five years. The Government has given conditional permission to four CSP companies—*i.e.*, Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Telekom Malaysia to build and manage hyper scale data centres and cloud services. The same matter was reported by Nur Zarina Othman, titled Blueprint set to boost Malaysia's digital economy (published by The New Straits Times on 19th February 2021) had also stated that these data-intensive data centres as well as

hybrid cloud services, will also be created to increase data storage space, reduce operating costs and improve analytical efficiency (ibid.)

Moreover, Malaysia had also proposed the appointment of three local ICT companies (*i.e.*, Enfrasys Consulting, Prestariang Systems and Cloud Connect) as Manage Service Providers (MSPs) to work with these CSPs in order to manage CSP services for public sector agencies—as well as strengthening the capabilities of local companies. Cloud services are expected to allow IoT, Big Data, AI, and other applications to be utilised in further strengthen the existing Government services. With God’s Grace by 2025, Malaysia’s digital economy is expected to contribute 22.6 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product—and, laid out 500,000 job opportunities in her digital economy (retrieved 24 May 2021, 8:20 am MYT).

All of all, a brief summation of expected achievements on MyDIGITAL may best be presented by the table below—Aspired Achievements of Malaysia’ Digital Economy Blueprint on Three Different Inter-Involving Sectors. More gains are expected to be derived through this blueprint in the near future, despite the extensive spread of Covid-19 pandemic. More pertinently to academic realms, those companies are expected to collaborate with local universities in founding up The Faculty of Artificial Intelligence (as well as providing services to the Government in providing continuous programs for employee skills improvement (ibid.):

CIVIL SECTORS (Continuous Aspirations)	GOVERNMENT SECTORS (Aspired Objectives)	BUSINESS SECTORS (Aspired Objectives)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 100% Internet access ➤ 500,000 job vacancies ➤ 100% online learning access ➤ Faculty of Artificial Intelligence at local universities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 80% of end-to-end online Government services ➤ 80% usage of cloud storage across Government sectors in 2022 ➤ 100% digital literacy amongst civil servants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 22.6% of GDP from digital economy by 2025 ➤ 30% productivity increase in all sectors by 2030 ➤ RM70 billion investment in digitalization

Symbiotically, the Malaysian Government will continue to assist in strengthening this new ecosystem in several ways, including (ibid.):

- By fostering a regulatory environment that supports digital use while protecting the privacy of citizens;
- By administering public data sources so that they can be jointly utilized by public and private organisations; and,
- By facilitating the evolution of the labour market in industries that are likely to be disrupted by automation and digital technology.

The Three Phases of Development of Malaysia’s Digital Economy

In addition, MyDIGITAL will be implemented in three phases of developments to accelerate innovation and to create an effective digital ecosystem. Brief descriptions of those three phases are as enlisted below (ibid.):

First Phase—2021 to 2022: Strengthening Digital Foundation

Total of RM21 billion will be invested over five years through the National Digital Network (JENDELA) project, aiming at strengthening the country’s existing connectivity. This fixed-line optical fiber network is expected to cover almost 100% of the population in stages from 7.5 million premises (by the end of 2022), to 9 million premises (by the end of 2025). Based on

this broader fiber optic network, the country is expected to be better prepared to switch to 5G network in the near future.

Second Phase–2023 to 2025: Inclusive Digital Transformation

Total of RM1.65 billion will be invested by several telecommunications companies, aiming at strengthening connection to the international cable network until 2023. Such steps are aimed at opening doors to faster and more stable international data transfer, thus lowering internet costs to consumers in Malaysia.

Third Phase–2026 to 2030: Affirming Regional Digital Lead

Total of RM15 billion will be invested over ten years for the implementation of 5G nationwide. This decision is expected to create approximately 105,000 job opportunities to Malaysians. This effort will be carried out through a special purpose vehicle under the Malaysian Government. This entity will then be given the appropriate spectrum to own, implement, and manage 5G infrastructures.

Indeed, the launch of this blueprint is highly significant with the increasing number of Malaysian Internet users. In the year 2020, users had reached up to 88.7—an increase of 1.3 percent from 2018, as reported by Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). With the current Covid-19 predicaments that requires all citizen to stay at home, street vendors (*i.e.*, gig-entrepreneurs or gig-workers) are taking full advantage of digitalization by having both online and offline operations.

CONTEMPORARY GIG-ECONOMY'S DEMANDS & CHALLENGES

Acknowledgment of gig-economy by the Malaysia Government begun in October 2019. The Malaysian Government then had recognised the fact that the gig-economy is here to stay and had laid plans to leverage on it for future growth of Malaysia's economy. This fact mentioned by Leslie Lau in her article, The pitfalls of not saving for the future in Malaysia's rising gig-economy, in The Malay Mail on 10th February 2020. The then Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad when referring to gig-workers, told Parliament that his administration acknowledges the need to safeguard workers' rights because they did not have financial safety nets like a pension or EPF savings. While the government looks at drafting new laws to protect them, the increasing number of contract workers in the gig-economy are operating without any legal protections (retrieved on 22nd May 2021, 12:58 pm MYT). Ironically, some scholars today still chose to perceive gig-economy as impertinent to the future economic survival of developing countries. Most chose to abandon the fact presented by The World Bank in 2020 that had estimated 26 percent of Malaysia's employment were already participating in the gig-economy. Truly, independent work and gig-economy had become the defining feature of Malaysia's current labour landscape. Khazanah Research Institute of Malaysia (KRI) *via* its report, Work in an Evolving Malaysia: The State of Households 2020 Part II described independent workers as those who are not engaged in traditional full-time positions with clear employment relations (*ibid.*).

Such workers would include GrabFood and Foodpanda delivery riders who are considered to be self-employed independent contractors. There are multiple permutations of this including the gig, contract, daily paid and self-employed workers. While these types of workers are not identical, they share similar risks (such as, higher income insecurity and inadequate social protection), and enjoy similar benefits of greater autonomy and flexibility. Last year, more than half of Malaysia's gig-workers are virtually full-time employees who rely on volatile contract

work as their only source of income. This fact was referred to a news report by Syed Jaymal Zahiid, in Malay Mail on 14th January 2020 (retrieved on 22nd May 2021, 12:18 pm MYT). That news article titled Survey shows gig-jobs no longer a side hustle, workers need protection, pointed out on the survey results involving over 400 e-hailing and application-based food-delivery service workers in random. Evidently, the survey underpinned the urgent need to relook at laws governing Malaysia's gig-economy—of which until today, has provided little social protection for its workers (ibid.).

The report derived from The Significance of Gig-Work to Gig-Workers and their Views on Social Protection survey, conducted by a think-tank known as The Centre. As more workers today perceive gig-economy as their primary source of income, the key findings of the survey that was conducted between 15th October 2019 and 16th November 2019. The data has displayed a growing need for adequate legal and social protection, amid rising public support for legislation to recognise the gig-workers as full-time employees. Such steps would be in accordance with the United Kingdom and the United States of America whom had already begun the process of instating laws in compelling their gig-workers with full-time benefits. The Centre said its survey is intended to identify to what extent gig-work — first conceptualised as a supplementary income source — has become a full-time job. The data also showed 75 percent of its respondents indicated that gig-income today has become an important source of household income. The survey also found that the average income of a full-time gig-workers was RM2999—just a few hundred ringgit above the wage threshold estimated by the Bank Negara Malaysia for city livings (ibid.).

Before the formation of MyDIGITAL, many more politicians had raised their concerns. Few existing legislations had been brought into public discussion—such as Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (Act 588), Competition Act 2010 (Act 712), and Competition Commission Act 2010 (Act 713). Such concerns, among others can be referred to Ida Lim's article (Protect Malaysia's gig-workers and ensure no monopolies possible through legal loopholes, PKR Youth chief tells govt) published by Malay Mail on 31st March 2021 (retrieved on 22nd May 2021, MYT). Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) Youth Chief Akmal Nasir was reportedly said, Putrajaya should take steps to protect the welfare of gig-workers and also close any possible loopholes that would enable monopolies by businesses. The concern was raised *via* a webinar which were attended by other Member of Parliament (MP)—Nurul Izzah Anwar and Wong Chen. Collectively, all of them had expressed concerns over the potential for monopoly by hiring companies of gig-economy—and set the stage for potential huge crisis in the future (ibid.).

Subsequently, the present Government had been urged to embark follow-up studies and close-monitoring on the regulation of Competition Act 2010. This was to ensure no loopholes for manipulation and monopoly are visible to the gig-industry players in the near future. Akmal Nasir had reportedly urged the Government to be more proactive in empowering the gig-economy and acting as a support system to guarantee sufficient protection for gig workers. The urge was made based on registration data that was derived from Malaysia's Social Security Organisation (SOCSO)—of which all Malaysia's gig-workers are compelled to register. Ironically, up to August 2020 last year, only 7 percent from the 400,000 estimation of Malaysia's total gig-workers had turned up (ibid.).

Evidently since the dawn of gig-economy, it had been fuelled by youths and women who chose to adapt to external regulatory framework—and thus made it harder for the Government to identify and enumerate them. Such accelerations had further ignited by escalating preference for self-employment; increasing internet users; and exponential growth in digital participation (ibid.).

In the light of the same discussion, The Department of Statistics Malaysia estimated that the digital economy of the country had contributed 18.5 percent of GDP in 2018 alone. The next

year (2019), eMarketer Malaysia ranked Malaysia among the Top 10 fastest growing e-commerce countries by online retail sales growth. These trends had been consistent with the increasing number of internet users, high mobile subscriptions, and changes in consumer behaviour (ibid.). The high rate of mobile users is highlighted as Malaysian internet connectivity and usage had been primarily facilitated by the increase in mobile phone users (ibid.). That means, the freedom of flexible working hours and multiple job vacancies demanded for a costly price. Undeniably, gig-workers all over the globe today are practically being left alone in facing risks of economic ups and downs. All of the many complaints on gig-economy had been consistently published all over the world's social and conventional media. An example that we may refer is *via* an article published by The Malay Mail, titled Gig-economy workers say they can no longer survive, on 28th December 2020 (retrieved on 22nd May 2021, MYT).

A gig-worker Amal Fahmi, age 24, had kept his eye glued to his cell phone and the Grab delivery application. He was one of many Malaysians who made a living *via* delivering stuffs by motorcycle from Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur. Amal Fahmi further explained that he only managed to earn a little more than Ringgit Malaysia (RM) 700 per month—after working extra-long hours daily. His average daily income only around RM27 after a gruelling 14 hours of workload. Indeed, the earning of every gig-workers to date are getting tougher by each passing day as their numbers are escalating. Amal Fahmi was reportedly said (ibid.):

"I could easily make a comfortable living before (by being a Grab car driver in Johor—southern state of Malaysia, before headed to Kuala Lumpur after the pandemic struck). But after the virus outbreak, life became tough as many people lost their jobs and my income was reduced. There were no job opportunities in my home town as I lack academic qualifications".

In the same news report, the same predicament had also being faced by Wissem Inal, age 32, in Paris suburbs. William Inal had to spend more than 700 kilometres (450 miles) a week on his scooter in delivering up to 10 takeout meals every evening, every day (ibid.):

"With the lockdown I end up with 500 euros a month net. A delivery that's worth six euros at noon is worth just three euros in the evening. You can't earn a living with this job, unless you're willing to live like a slave".

William Inal had driven for Deliveroo since 2017 and taken jobs for Uber Eats and Stuart. At that moment, he couldn't see the good side of his job—and thus had criticised payment calculations made by Deliveroo. Since then he had joined an association of gig-delivery drivers that seeks to improve gig worker's working conditions. Another gig-worker, Erica Mighetto in Sacramento USA claimed that in 2017, she could grossly earn USD60 to USD80 per hour in the field of property management. Unfortunately in early 2020, a series of rate cuts caused her earnings to fall to USD20 per hour—and keep on declining to USD10 in March 2020 (ibid.).

In simpler comprehension, despite the ratification of Proposition 22 (California Referendum), Erica Mighetto claimed that her life is still bitter. Adding salt to her wound, last spring she had given up driving for the fear of catching Covid-19. Indeed, things are getting worse with the spread of Covid-19. This global calamity has transformed gig-workers' existing hardships into daily nightmares. They now fear for the possibility of meager earnings from jobs that are putting them increasingly vulnerable in each passing day.

CONCLUSION

Without prejudice, we are now in the era of unprecedented catastrophes. It was unprecedented not because it had never occurred before—it was due to our own arrogance in admitting our deliberate ignorance. Take a look around us and we may find the truth behind that notion. This dawn of the 21st Century seemed to have brought upon our doorsteps a countless challenges and obstacles. What worse is, they are swarming us all at once—and out of a sudden.

Every national plans seemed obsolete and irrelevant. The uncertainties appear in all avenues of social, economy, and politic. Socially, we are being forced to handle issues on moral decadence, and fake news or vague information disseminations at Nano speed. Economically for instance, we had to tackle the new hybrid of employment (*i.e.*, gig-entrepreneurs and gig workers), and the rights of employment matter for both sides. Politically, almost every Government today is gasping for breath in handling netizens' needs, necessities, reports, demands, and complaints. Politicians are juggling between gaining popularity among netizens and necessary political decisions. And now, while we are battling all of those, the world is faced with pandemic Covid-19. Having stated that, it seems easy to blame on the rapid development of ICT that invaded us 30 years ago—beginning with the fall of Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989. Or perhaps, some people would prefer to point finger towards any ruling Government—or anyone, except to himself. After all, blame is the oldest game that most mankind had championed of since the dawn of history. To the most extremes to date, religion serves as their fall back plans—of where they seek and found comfort from when all hopes were lost.

Now, we might have paused to ponder on few inevitable questions: (1.) Had humanity faced something as catastrophic as this before; (2.) Had there been any resolutions to something similar to this chaos; and, (3.) Had we succeeded in facing such tribulations before? Evidently, the first rule for successful treatment is—the patient must first openly admit that he is sick, and need help. In other word, we all must begin by embracing the fact that we are now being dragged back into The Age of Great Depression.

This depressive age does not refer only to the incidents of market crash at Wall Street on October 1929. We are dealing with far more colossal events that our forefathers had faced before—and had victoriously emerged. For those who had really observed history with utmost precisions, all of today's predicaments are of no difference with incidences occurred at every turn of a new Century. The first 20 years of the 20th Century, for instance, had served a buffet of epic wars and famines. Among the notables are the Chinese Famine (1907), the Xinhai Revolution (1911–1912), the World War I (1914–1918), the Battle of Gallipoli (1915-1916), the Bolshevik Revolution (1917–1923), and the Spanish flu (1918-1920). The exact millions of casualties resulted from these events would never be fully attained. So much so, the seed of those plights had sprouted out 20 years later in the 1940's across European countries when they became the subject of many war campaigns by infamous warlords such as Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, Benito Mussolini, Adolph Hitler, and Vladimir Lenin (Wikipedia, retrieved 29th May 2021, MYT).

In the light of discussion on gig-economy, we now must openly embrace the fact that the world of employment today had changed—and it requires immediate and exhaustive measures in safeguarding future profession and economy. Also, we urgently need of drafting new legislation—though it won't be absolute at the very beginning, but we must start somewhere. As for Malaysia where most of its employers are Malay Muslims, the need of this new legislation is paramount. We had manoeuvred the most impossible campaign in establishing global networking for Halal-hub before; we will certainly be able to survive this turbulence too. The essence lies in our mind. If and only if, for one second we are willing to open-up and begin gazing upon the pages of history, we would have found the same old solution to all problems that had been laid before us. Of which, it will always begin by simple face of an honest acceptance that we are sick. The second phase is in admitting that we need help. And the final phase is, getting the right treatment. Most importantly, throughout all of the remedying processes, one's mental strength must always stood as the sole lexicon in assuring the absolute sobriety attainment.

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